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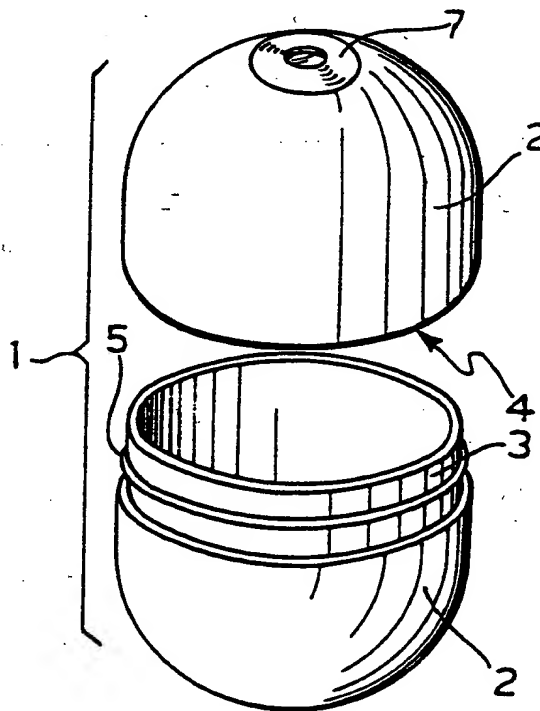
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(54) Title: A CONTAINER FOR SURPRISE GIFTS AND THE LIKE, FOR EXAMPLE, FOR CHOCOLATE EGGS

(57) Abstract

The container (1), which is intended to be used for inserting so-called "surprise gifts" in hollow articles such as, for example, chocolate eggs (U), is constituted by two half-shells (2) each including a dome-like portion (6) and a skirt portion (8). The dome-like portions (6) are generally hemispherical and are much longer, measured axially of the container, than the corresponding skirt portions (8).



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A container for surprise gifts and the like, for example, for chocolate eggs

The present invention relates to containers for surprise gifts and the like, for example, for inserting gifts such as small toys, trinkets, jewellery, etc. in, for example, hollow food products such as chocolate eggs and the like.

Such a container is described, for example, in Italian utility model No. 0163428.

This prior document describes a container in the form of a small box which can be opened and is constituted essentially by two cylindrical, cup-shaped bodies, the mutually-facing mouths of which can be connected to together, for example, by snap-engagement, to form a closed shell. A small toy, trinket, or the like currently known as a "surprise gift" is inserted in the container.

This known solution has subsequently been developed to give rise to gift containers which have found considerable commercial success. In these subsequent solutions, the end portions of the two cup-shaped bodies (or half-shells) have been generally rounded so that the container formed, when they are connected together, has two generally dome-like opposite ends. The two portions or half-shells constituting the shell are connected firmly with the use of a generally male-and-female coupling arrangement in which one half-shell has a neck portion for fitting in the open mouth portion of the other half-shell. The outer surface of the neck portion and the inner surface of the complementary mouth portion of the other half-shell also have an annular rib and a groove for

the snap-engagement of the rib, respectively.

In this solution, however, if one considers the container in the closed condition, its cross-section in a diametral plane still retains a generally rectangular shape. In fact, the axial length of the dome-like end portion of each of the two half-shells (without considering the connecting neck portion of the half-shell which has one) is about half the overall length of the half-shell. In other words, in each half-shell of this known solution, the length of the dome-like portion is approximately equal to the length of the remaining cylindrical portion which is intended, in one half-shell, to carry the connecting neck portion (which is also cylindrical) and, in the other half-shell, to form the mouth portion (which naturally is cylindrical) for housing the neck portion.

From an observation of the assembled container, therefore, it can be seen that, in practice, half of its axial length is taken up by the intermediate cylindrical portion and the other half by the two dome-like end portions.

Although this solution has certainly been found to be effective from a functional point of view, it may give rise to various problems connected essentially with the fact that, in its most common use, the container is intended to be inserted in a chocolate egg and, in particular, in a chocolate egg having approximately the dimensions of a natural hen's egg.

These problems can be summarised essentially by the following factors:

- given the dimensions of the hollow article (the chocolate egg) in which the container is to be inserted, the diametral dimensions of the container (and, in particular, the diameter of its intermediate cylindrical portion) are often inadequate both as regards the ability of the container to house gifts of a certain size (which often necessitates the use, according to a somewhat unfavourable solution, of gifts which are disassembled for insertion in the container and have to be reassembled after they have been removed from the container) and as regards the need, which often arises due to consumer safety requirements, to prevent the container as a whole from being accidentally swallowed, and

- the container is often inserted in a hollow food product, for example, a chocolate egg, which is generally delicate and often quite soft (if one considers a chocolate egg which has just been taken out of its mould), the wall of which may therefore be dented by the edges of the container and, possibly, as a result of the container sticking to the internal wall of the hollow body.

The object of the present invention is to provide a container of the type specified above which overcomes the aforesaid problems.

According to the present invention, this object is achieved by virtue of a container having the specific characteristics recited in the following claims.

The invention will now be described, purely by way of non-limiting example, with reference to the appended drawings, in which:

Figure 1 is a general perspective view of a container according to the invention, in the closed condition,

Figure 2 shows the structure of the container of Figure 1, in the open condition, and

Figure 3 shows a container according to the invention inserted in a hollow article such as, for example, a chocolate egg.

In the drawings, a container to be used, for example, for inserting a small toy, trinket, item of jewellery, etc. (that is, a so-called "surprise gift") in a hollow article, such as, for example, a chocolate egg, is generally indicated 1.

According to a known solution (which enables it to be used in a manner which is also widely known and does not need to be recited herein), the container 1 is constituted essentially by two cup-shaped bodies or half-shells 2 of moulded plastics material which are intended to be connected facing each other with the use of a cylindrical neck portion 3 on one of the half-shells for fitting in the mouth portion 4 of the other half-shell.

In order to favour a firm connection between the two half-shells, the outer surface of the neck portion 3 has an annular rib 5 for snap-engagement in a corresponding groove (not visible in the drawings) which is also annular, in the inner wall of the mouth portion 4 of the other half-shell 2.

The container 1 is generally made up initially by the insertion of the so-called surprise gift (a toy,

trinket, item of jewellery, etc.) in one of the half-shells, (usually the one with the neck portion 3) and the subsequent snap-closure of the other half-shell 2 onto the half-shell containing the gift.

At this point, the container 1 can be inserted in a hollow article such as, for example, a chocolate egg U; for example, this may be a chocolate egg having roughly the dimensions of a natural hen's egg.

This is all according to known criteria which do not need to be described in detail herein.

As can best be appreciated from the perspective view of Figure 1 (and, in particular, from the side elevational view 3 which shows schematically the position of the container 1 in the egg U), it is possible generally to distinguish in each half-shell 2 a dome-like end portion or base 6 which is generally hemispherical, except for a slightly flattened polar region 7 (which can best be seen in Figures 1 and 2), and a generally cylindrical body or skirt portion 8.

To give an idea of their dimensions (with reference to an embodiment which is not, however, intended to be limiting), the radius of each dome-like portion 6 is of the order of 17 mm, defining a diameter of the base of the dome (which corresponds to the diameter of the skirt portion 8 and hence to the transverse diameter of the container 1 as a whole) of about 34-34.5 mm.

As regards the relative lengths of the domes and the skirt portions 8, (that is, their lengths measured axially both of the half-shells 2 and of the container as a whole), however, it can be seen that, for an

overall length of each half-shell of 23.5 mm (again excluding the neck portion 3 of the part which has one), the dome takes up about 17-18 mm, and hence about 3/4 of the length.

This means that of the overall length of the closed container (which is about 46.5 mm) about 3/4 is taken up by the two end domes and only the remaining 1/4 or thereabouts is taken up by the central cylindrical portion defined by the two connected skirt portions 8.

These relative sizes of the parts, together with the general spherical configuration of the two end domes, have two essential advantages:

- this conformation enables the container 1 to have the maximum diametral dimensions for given internal dimensions of the body housing it (in the embodiment illustrated, the chocolate egg U), which means, on the one hand, that a fairly large gift, particularly a small toy or item of jewellery, can be inserted without the need to use disassembled products for reassembly by the user (it should be taken into consideration that, if the container is formed of plastics material for food use, its wall is a few millimeters thick and this is in fact negligible as regards the space occupied) and, on the other hand, that the risk of the container being accidentally swallowed can be minimised,

- the generally spherical configuration of the two domes 8, which in fact avoids the presence of parts with quite small radii of curvature, minimises the risk of damage to the internal wall of the hollow body 1 even if it is still quite soft (for example, chocolate which has still not fully cooled); this configuration

also minimises the risk of damage should the container become stuck to the walls of the hollow body U.

Naturally, the scope of the invention also extends to models which achieve equal utility by means of the same innovative concept.

CLAIMS

1. A container for surprise gifts or the like which are to be inserted in hollow bodies (U), including two half-shells (2) which can be connected (3, 5) facing each other, in which each half-shell includes a dome-like base portion (6) and a skirt portion (8) for connection to the skirt portion (8) of the other half-shell (2), characterised in that the half-shells (2) satisfy at least one of the following conditions:

- the dome-like portions (6) are generally hemispherical, and

- the dome-like portions (6) are substantially longer generally axially of the respective half-shells (2) than the corresponding skirt portions (8).

2. A container according to Claim 1, characterised in that its dome-like portions (6) are about three times longer axially of the respective half-shells (2) than the corresponding skirt portions (8).

3. A container according to Claim 1 or Claim 2, characterised in that its dome-like portions (6) have generally flattened polar portions (7).

4. A container according to any one of Claims 1 to 3, characterised in that one of the half-shells (2) has a neck portion (3) extending from its skirt portion (8) for fitting in the skirt portion (8) of the other half-shell (2).

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FIG. 1

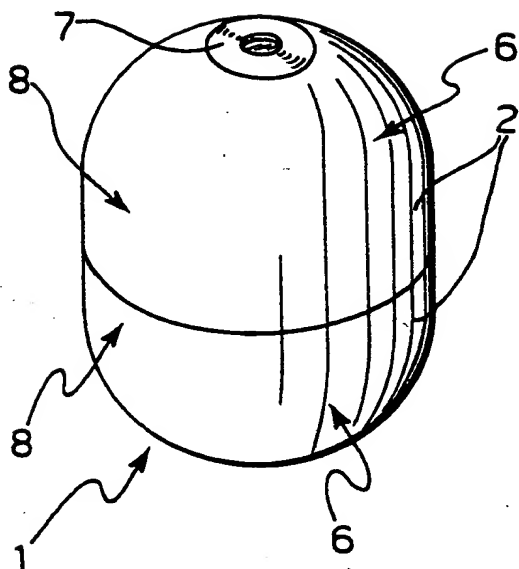


FIG. 2

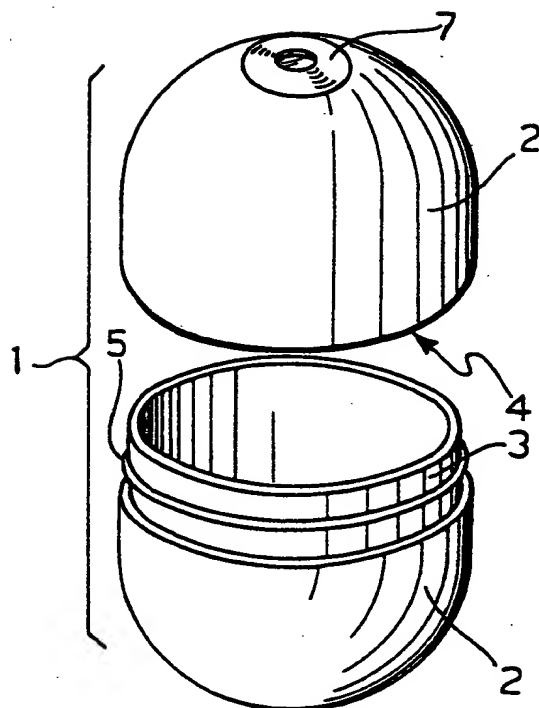
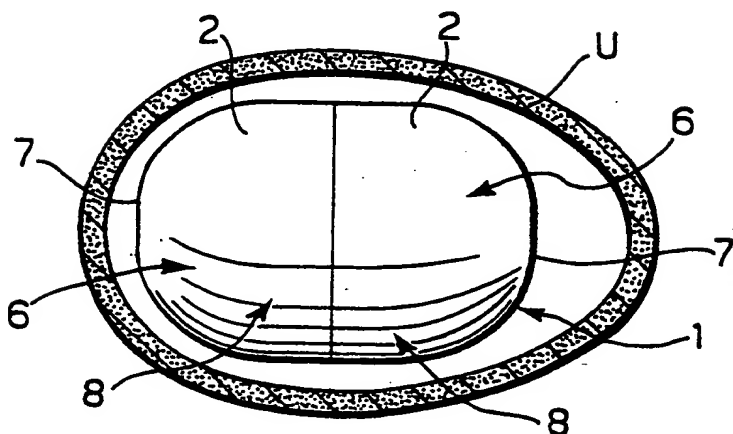


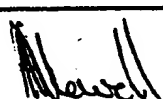
FIG. 3



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/EP 92/01407

I. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER (If several classification symbols apply, indicate all) ⁶ According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both National Classification and IPC Int.C1: 5 B65D8/00		
II. FIELDS SEARCHED Minimum Documentation Searched ⁷		
Classification System	Classification Symbols	
Int.C1: 5	B65D	
Documentation Searched other than Minimum Documentation to the Extent that such Documents are Included in the Fields Searched ⁸		
III. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT⁹		
Category ¹⁰	Citation of Document, ¹¹ with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages ¹²	Relevant to Claim No. ¹³
X	US,A,4 765 501 (KAO) 23 August 1988 see the whole document	1-4
X	US,A,2 998 896 (MILLER) 5 September 1961 see the whole document	1-4
X	LU,A,69 157 (FERRERO) 8 April 1974 see the whole document	1-4
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IV. CERTIFICATION		
Date of the Actual Completion of the International Search <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">30 SEPTEMBER 1992</div>		Date of Mailing of this International Search Report <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">29. 10. 92</div>
International Searching Authority <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">EUROPEAN PATENT OFFICE</div>		Signature of Authorized Officer <div style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold;">NEWELL P.G.</div> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 10px;">  </div>

**ANNEX TO THE INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT
ON INTERNATIONAL PATENT APPLICATION NO. EP 9201407
SA 61453**

This annex lists the patent family members relating to the patent documents cited in the above-mentioned international search report. The members are as contained in the European Patent Office EDP file on
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Patent document cited in search report	Publication date	Patent family member(s)	Publication date
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US-A-2998896		None	
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		BE-A- 810031	16-05-74
		CA-A- 1033986	04-07-78
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